

the worst combination that
vowels and consonants
had ever been susceptible of.

One night during the Romantic Movement
S.T.C. carried his howling baby son
outside into the orchard
to show him the full moon;

S.T.C. watched the baby's quiet face
and the moon reflect each other
like circular mirrors
and he held up the weightless life
of his son's blue, watery head
and forgot about his awful name.

His son's name was Hartley,
after a philosopher.
His wife's name was Sara.
His mistress's name was Sarah, too.
His partner's name was William

which is also my name
which I never much cared for.
William: it sounds like the name
of a king or an A student.

SILVER DOLLARS

My great grandfather
was the man who held

queens
over fours

in the hand
that Wild Bill Hickock
had the now dreaded
aces and eights.

It turned out to be
the second best hand
(nobody else had shit)

so he took the pot,
Wild Bill having been shot
in the back
by a runt.

Everyone thought
he should have kicked it in
for the great man's funeral expenses

but he didn't
and that's why my family
today
is so enormously wealthy.

-- Billy Collins

Scarsdale, NY

INITIAL MEETING

You were like a lost book
I hadn't finished reading: something
I thought I'd like. I was at once grateful
we didn't get to know each other
well enough to be harsh; and afraid,
in case we never met again. I heard last night Renoir
did not make drawings first, therefore his edges blent
like petals into evening, and I thought
I'd tell you that. I don't
especially care for Renoir,
but I like his method.

EMPLOYMENT ON THE COAST

Summer jobs were curious. Once I worked for a man
who said we would sell jewelry,
but what we did was pick ticks off his dog
all day. I was well paid. Often,
he'd smooth his hands down
over my waist and say, "How do you like it --
the way I've fixed up the shop?" We never were lovers,
although the thought of him destroyed
my love for another. We watched monster movies
and the Watergate hearings
while we groomed the dog, or put earrings on it.
I thought it was a very good summer,
though we never were lovers. He was blond as a ghost.
I conceal his identity here: he didn't
own the shop and it wasn't his dog. The rest
is true, and the day we were meant to close the deal,